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THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA.

The sixteenth annual meeting of the MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA was held at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va., December 27, 28, 29, 1898. The invitation to meet in Charlottesville proceeded officially from Dr. Paul B. Barringer, Chairman of the Faculty, in accordance with the vote of the Faculty, January 5, 1897, upon the motion offered by Professor J. A. Harrison and seconded by Professor C. W. Kent (cf. *Proceedings for 1897*, p. xv).

The first session was held in the Public Hall; all the remaining sessions were held in the Y. M. C. A. Hall of the University.

FIRST SESSION, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27.

The first session of the meeting was convened in the Auditorium of the Public Hall, at 7.30 o'clock p. m. Dr. Paul B. Barringer, Chairman of the Faculty of the University, presided, and opened the session with brief words of welcome; Professor George W. Miles, Headmaster of St. Alban's School, followed in an elaborate and eloquent address of welcome in behalf of the Board of Visitors of the University of which he is a member. To these addresses of welcome the Secretary of the Association cordially responded.

The President of the Association, Professor Alcée Fortier, was then introduced to deliver his following annual address. Subject: "Historical and social forces in French literature."

The word *philology*, taken in its broadest sense, is now understood by all scholars to signify the study of literature as well as of language; it means, in reality, the study of civilization. The history of civilization is an account of the customs of a people, of the events which have taken place in politics, in war, in science, and in literature. The historian of civilization covers such an immense field of research that he must neglect facts of minor importance and study principally the causes and results of great events. He must study the souls of men, in order to see what influence external causes have produced on the individuals composing a nation; and, just as causes act somewhat differently on individuals, and each man has his own ideas, so it is with nations, which differ in civilization, although exposed to influences nearly similar.

Western Europe, in the Middle Ages, was invaded by the barbarians, became christian, became feudal, undertook the crusades, explored the New World; there were, in fact, nearly the same institutions in all occidental countries. Who will say, however, that the civilization of France, of England, of Germany, of Italy, of Spain have been exactly similar? All these countries have in common the general traits of European civilization, which is very different from the Asiatic; but, as the historical and social forces have necessarily not been the same in all countries of Western Europe, the civilization of each has been somewhat different from that of the others, and the literature which is, in great part, the product of a peculiar civilization, has peculiar and distinct traits.

It is true that all mankind is animated by the same psychical forces inherent in humanity, and that a great work of art, whether produced by a Homer, a Virgil, a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Calderón, a Molière, a Goethe, is permeated with the same broad human feeling, but each man is bound to reproduce in his work the effect of the civilization to which he belongs. That civilization is largely an inheritance, which the individual enjoys by the mere fact of being born in a certain atmosphere; but, as civilization means development, new historical and social forces are constantly being brought to bear upon the individual and are modifying his ideas. There are, therefore, three great causes which mold the mind of the individual: (1) the fact of being a man, which gives him ideas and sentiments common to all men; (2) his birthplace, which impresses upon him the civilization of his country; (3) the social and historical forces produced in his own lifetime.

It is often exceedingly difficult to perceive the effect upon a writer of social and historical forces, whether contemporary or handed down from former times. It is evident that events do not produce the same effects upon all men, and to measure those effects we must study the life of an author and try to lay bare his heart. Biography is essential for understanding thoroughly the motives by which a writer has been actuated, for, just as the civilization of France produces its effect on all Frenchmen, so it is with local influences. M. Gaston Paris says that "all the provinces

did not take in the Middle Ages an equal part in the literary activity." We must, therefore, study very carefully the surroundings of an author, *le milieu*, to which Sainte-Beuve attached such a great importance, but we must also call psychology to our aid, as Bourget has done, to probe the human soul, the human heart, to find out what causes make that heart throb like the beating of a mighty hammer on a gigantic anvil, or what causes render the pulsation as faint and feeble as the rustling of the leaves agitated by a gentle breeze.

Michelet, in the second volume of his History of France, presents to us a striking tableau of the characteristics of each of the provinces and gives an admirable explanation of the influence of local causes, of topography and geography, we may say, on the genius of a nation. Great social and historical forces were at work at different epochs in the different provinces of France, and French civilization is the result of all these forces. I do not wish to be understood as denying the personal influence of a man of genius upon his epoch, for it has often happened that a strong and well-marked individuality in a writer has changed considerably the character of an epoch, and that a great literary work has produced a lasting effect on the literature of the time contemporary with it and on that of subsequent ages.

M. Brunetière says that the principal influence in literature is that of works upon works. That influence is certainly very important, but it is not the principal one. So many forces have contributed to the civilization of every country and to the development of every literature that it is impossible to say which one of these forces has been the most active and the most fruitful. If a great writer has produced a change in the civilization of his time, that change is never as complete as it might appear, inasmuch as the writer must reflect some ideas common to his race, to his country, and to all men. Again, admitting that the personal influence of one man had produced a change almost complete on his epoch and on the literature of his time, that influence of an individual becomes a social force and reacts on other individuals, who may, in their turn, impress the stamp of their genius on civilization and on literature. Historical and social forces are, therefore, continually brought in contact with forces apparently entirely personal and literary, and there is a perpetual reaction of the one class of forces on the other. It is very difficult, as I have said, to trace the relative value or importance of all the forces which have brought about a certain development of a literature, but it is interesting to study some of them and to ascertain the result. We may not be able to say which one of a number of rivulets, tributaries to a noble river, has poured into it the largest stream of pure water, but we may find a great pleasure in drifting with the placid current of the rivulets, until we reach the mighty and impetuous river. It is my purpose to describe briefly some of the principal historical and social forces in French literature, without pretending to say which ones have been the most important. This is but a

bird's eye view of a vast subject, which would call for the wonderful critical acumen of a Sainte-Beuve, of a Taine, of a Brunetière, of our own colleague, Professor Kuno Francke, were it attempted to analyze minutely the different phases of the subject.

M. Gaston Paris, in his *Littérature Française au Moyen Age*, has explained so clearly the earliest historical and social forces in French literature that, in speaking of that epoch, we can only express briefly well known facts.

The great majority of the inhabitants of Gaul belonged to the Celtic race, but the influence of that race was not felt in the literature of France, for Gaul was thoroughly romanized by Cæsar's conquest. Vulgar Latin became the language of the Gallo-Romans, and classical Latin being, at first, the language of the State and, at all times, of the Church, was taught in the schools and was written and spoken by the clergy and by the learned men, even after French had arisen from the vulgar Latin and had become the speech of the people. "This," says M. Paris, "cut the nation in two," and it delayed the development of French literature by keeping away from it a large number of men of culture.

The Roman conquest, however, was a great historical and social force by substituting an old civilization for the Celtic civilization yet in its infancy, and by bringing into Gaul new customs and new ideas, which were to be reflected later in literature. One of the most important results of the conquest was the adoption of christianity by the Gauls, much earlier than if the Celts had remained independent, and christianity, as a social force in literature, was most potent in the Middle Ages. The absolute faith of the people in the teachings of the church, their delight in everything concerning sacred history gave rise to the miracles and the mysteries, whilst the large number of priests and of monks was a fruitful source of satirical writings. Let us call attention here to the wonderful force contributed by the monasteries for the future development of literature in the preservation by the monks of the masterpieces of antiquity.

The conquest of the Gallo-Romans by the Germanic tribes is another important historical and social force. The conquerors adopted the language of the conquered and, to a great extent, their civilization, but some Germanic traditions and ideas survived, and blending with the new christian civilization of the Gallo-Romans, produced, says M. Gaston Paris, the French epic of the Middle Ages.

In the course of centuries, after the Merovingians and the Carolingians had reigned, and the national dynasty of the Capetians had arisen, we see feudal society constituted, and the influence of that society is easily seen in literature. The rude and haughty baron, the knight and the gentle lady, are faithfully depicted in the *chansons de geste* and in the Arthurian romances, and the farces and the fabliaux give us an insight into the life of the *bourgeois* and of the *vilains*. If literature is "*the expression of society*" it was never more clearly so than during the Middle Ages. The end of that period was marked by the calamities of the Hundred Years' war and

by the tireless efforts of Louis XI. to destroy the power of the great nobles, but these events had little influence on social life and on literature. It was the Italian wars of Charles VIII., Louis XII., and Francis I., which brought about principally the Renaissance of the 16th century.

The sense of the artistic was the chief gain of the expeditions of the French beyond the Alps, and under the intelligent patronage of Francis I. the taste for the beautiful spread over France, as well as a desire to study the writers of antiquity. Marguerite de Navarre and Clément Marot were the products of the first period of the Renaissance and were inspired by their taste for the artistic, whilst Ronsard and his school appeared in the second period and were influenced both by Italian art and by their enthusiasm for the masterpieces of Greece and of Rome. It was then that Joachim Du Bellay wrote his *Défense et illustration de la langue française*, that Jodelle produced *Cléopâtre*; and that the members of the *Pléiade* vied with one another in writing tragedies, comedies, and odes, imitated from the ancients. The Renaissance had really taken place and it had been brought about by historical forces which had reacted on society and on literature.

Besides Marot and Ronsard, Rabelais and Montaigne were representatives of that epoch, and both were influenced greatly by the Reformation. The religious controversies of the time emboldened Rabelais and allowed him to make the satire of society and its institutions, and the horrors of the religious dissensions and wars gave rise to the scepticism of Montaigne and induced him to study all questions affecting the mind and the soul of men.

However, the religious controversies of the 16th century did not always lead to scepticism or to indifference, as with Montaigne and a number of men of that epoch, but the period of the Reformation produced works inspired by sincere faith, those of Calvin, of Saint François de Sales, the poetic Discourses of Ronsard, the energetic verses of Du Bartas and of d'Aubigné, the concise and strong Memoirs of Monluc.

The Italian influence, so potent for the revival of arts and letters, was felt more directly after the death of Francis I. and Henry II., when Catherine de Medici governed France in the name of her sons, and the comedies of Larivey are due to that historical and social force. Spanish influence began also to be felt in the latter part of the 16th century, when the League almost betrayed France into the hands of Philip II., and in the celebrated *Satire Ménippée* the patriotic authors of that pamphlet attacked the Spanish party with most bitter and witty irony. However, when the *Ménippée* appeared Henry IV. had already won his throne, and with his reign began the period of order and stability which is the distinctive mark of the 17th century, in spite of the disorders which took place during the minorities of Louis XIII. and Louis XIV.

M. Gustave Lanson, in his very valuable *Histoire de la Littérature Française*, explains admirably the transition from the period of the Renaissance

to the 17th century. He states that "reason, matured in the agitations of the age, and the study of the ancients, is permeated with a positive and scientific rationalism. The domain of faith is excepted: beyond that, everything is decided by reason. This leads to two consequences: literature becomes the expression of truth; it must then be sincere and objective."—"Literature," adds M. Lanson, "in which reason tends to dominate, is directed towards the universal: it recognizes for its object what each one finds in himself: truth and custom." In this last sentence M. Lanson agrees with M. Brunetière, who states that the essential trait of French literature is sociability. If there is a tendency towards the universal, towards the study of the individual taken as the type of the human race, then literature is sociable and is easily understood by all men. M. Lanson, however, restricts his statement to the 17th century, whilst M. Brunetière bases his whole theory of the evolution of French literature on the characteristic traits of the 17th century: the spirit of order, the impersonality or objectivism of the literary works, and the social spirit.

The clearness and the conciseness of French literature comes from the desire of the authors to be easily understood, and from that cause also, according to M. Brunetière, comes the lack of the lyric spirit to be noticed generally in French writers. They have neglected the *ego*, the *moi*, in their desire to be sociable, and have lost in lyric spirit what they have gained in clearness, conciseness, and good sense. There is a great deal of truth in the above theory, although a number of works do not agree with the fundamental rule. With regard to the 17th century there is no doubt that the great historical and social forces tended to establish in France order and regularity, and these two qualities are preëminent in the works of that time.

Malherbe was the embodiment of the spirit which was to animate the 17th century, and he expressed in his works the tendency of his contemporaries towards order and regularity. There was yet, at that time, coarseness in customs and language, and literature reflected society but too well. Here comes the great influence of l'Hôtel de Rambouillet in the refinement of society and of literature, and we may pardon the affectation, the *marinisme*, and *gongorisme* of the *précieuses*. The authors who frequented the *salon* of Julie d'Angennes sought to please the society of their time, became more polite, more *universal*, more clear; but both M. Brunetière and M. Lanson call our attention to the fact that the social spirit which permeates French literature has prevented it from being as deeply philosophical as the literatures of some other nations. I desire to give here a characteristic extract from M. Brunetière's *Évolution des Genres*, page 128: "If you wish to know for what reasons some of our greatest writers—I except always the Bossuets and the Pascals, to whom their trade or as the second one says their *sign* permitted it—if you wish to know why Racine or Molière, for instance, have not always reached that depth of thought which we find in a Shakespeare or in a Goethe; or again, why

such questions, as that of destiny, which are enveloped in a *Hamlet* or in a *Faust*, seem to have remained foreign to them, 'cherchez la femme,' and you will find that the fault is due to the influence of the *salons* and of women. They have wished to please; and, in order to please, they have tried to accommodate themselves to the world. They have granted, they have conceded something to fashion, Molière the ceremony of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Racine his Pyrrhuses, his Xiphareses and his Achilles. Especially they have not themselves taken, or seemed to take life more seriously than was done around them; or, at least, when they have done so, it was when their genius was greater in them than the desire to please."

I can hardly agree with all that M. Brunetière says in the above quotation from his learned work. I believe in the influence on literature of social forces, but whether French writers were less philosophical than those of other countries, that might well be disputed; it seems hard to lay all the blame of that inferiority in depth of thought to the paramount influence of women. True genius rises superior to its surroundings, and it is often impossible to trace in a great work of art the forces that have given birth to it. Take away from Molière some accessories of his time, and we may place Tartuffe, Harpagon, Alceste, and many other characters, in any epoch, and they will always be true. Some of the wonderful poems of Lamartine, of Hugo, of Musset, of Vigny, seem to have been dictated to the poets by the Creator himself, and no historical or social forces can account for them. It is true that M. Brunetière says that lyric poetry is a deviation from the classic ideal, and that the study of the *moi* is outside the essential social spirit of French literature. This theory, I repeat it, is very interesting, and, in the main, correct, but let us not be guided entirely by it. The danger in all theories is that we are liable to be influenced unduly by them and to wish to judge everything according to preconceived ideas. Let us try to discover what are the essential traits in the character of a nation and of its literature, but let us admit that, in many cases, we cannot find the causes of events in history and of the forces in literature. We must be thankful, however, to men who have original ideas and who make us think in our turn. For my part I cannot be too grateful to M. Brunetière and M. Lanson, although I do not share all their opinions.

The principal social force in the age of Louis XIV. was the influence of the king himself. When he began his personal reign, after Mazarin's death, he found royal authority supreme, and his excellent judgment and strong will established perfect order in the kingdom. The encouragement and help he gave to Molière, Boileau, and Racine, are well known, and by receiving so kindly at his court men of letters, who were often of inferior birth, he gave them, as M. Brunetière points out, a culture, a politeness, a refinement which they could never have obtained otherwise, and which are felt in their writings. Many works are a glorification of the king, and praise which sounds excessive to us was natural and proper at the time. We may understand and excuse the eulogy of the king in *Tartuffe*, when we remember the debt of gratitude which Molière owed Louis XIV.

The court of the Great King was, for more than half a century, the only *salon* in France and was the polite society of the age and an important force in literature. La Rochefoucauld was somewhat influenced by it, when he produced his *Maxims*, and Mme de Sévigné wholly so when she wrote her charming letters. I venture to add that the exquisite *Princesse de Clèves* of Mme de La Fayette could not have been written at any time before the 17th century. The charm and conciseness of that work coincided with the spirit of a refined and orderly society. Literature, in the 17th century, was less subjective than at any other period in French history, but it is national, inasmuch as it represents the spirit of the age which is so essentially sociable and human.

The influence of religion was felt, not only in admirable sermons, but also in the Provincial Letters of Pascal, written for the defense of the Jansenists. In Bossuet's Universal History we see the profound faith of the author in the almightiness of God and in the Creator's will to regulate the affairs of men.

The celebrated quarrel about the ancients and the moderns between Boileau and Perrault was caused by the latter's belief in the excellence of everything connected with the age of Louis XIV., and especially of the literature which was the expression of that age. The Characters of La Bruyère are a study of contemporary society, and Fénelon's Telemachus represents the court of Louis XIV. more faithfully than it does antiquity. Ulysses could scarcely have recognized his son in the French Télémaque, but Louis XIV. did not fail to recognize his grandson, the duke of Burgundy, in Fénelon's hero, and himself in Idoménée.

The 18th century was very different from the 17th; royalty, under Louis XV. and Louis XVI., was no longer a great social force; the religious feeling was less profound and was replaced by philosophy and science, and incredulity was expressed more freely. The literary *salons* appeared again, when the court of Louis XIV. existed no longer, and the influence of women was again deeply felt, as at the time of l'Hôtel de Rambouillet. The French language and French literature were all-powerful in Europe in the 18th century, but the influence of English literature may be seen in a number of Voltaire's works and in Montesquieu. During the 17th century, after 1660, the French writers had imitated no longer Italy and Spain. Literature represented faithfully the great social changes brought about by the Regency of Philip of Orleans and by the appearance of the financier, after the failure of Law's system. *Turcaret*, *Le Glorieux*, and many other comedies might be mentioned which portray the customs of the time. Indeed, in nearly all the writers of the 18th century, we see clearly the influence of the following historical and social forces: the gradual downfall of the monarchy, the struggle of the new philosophical ideas against old established beliefs and customs, and a certain maudlin sentimentality. Rousseau's works, says M. Brunetière, were acts, but we may add that they were caused by social forces which swayed the author,

before he swayed, in his turn, the society of his time and shattered its foundations. Beaumarchais' *Barbier de Séville* and *Mariage de Figaro* were also the direct product of social forces, of changes which were taking place in society and were to end in the greatest revolution that the world has ever seen.

What was the influence of the Revolution on literature? It destroyed polite society for a number of years and almost destroyed literature, which is, as we have seen, so often the expression of society. However, the imitation on the political stage of Greek and Roman heroes, brought about, strange to say, a return to classic literature, and we see the names and the supposed ideas and customs of the ancients reproduced in many pretentious and bombastic works. There was, we may say, no literature in France from the day when the great poet, André Chénier, mounted the scaffold in 1794 until, as M. Faguet expresses it so well, Chateaubriand "renovated French imagination." Let us now cast a rapid glance at the literature of the 19th century and mention a few historical and social forces.

The wars of the Revolutionary period and of the Empire were not favorable to literary productions, but there are in the literature of that age, two great names that represent forces which were to be very potent in the 19th century, Chateaubriand and Mme de Staël. After the excesses of the Reign of Terror and the frivolity of the Directory there was a great longing for things ideal and religious, and a renewal of the love of nature inculcated by Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Chateaubriand was the happy interpreter of these feelings, of these forces, religion and nature, and he exerted an immense influence on literature. Tossed about, like so many of his contemporaries, by the tempest of the Revolution he had not felt the social influence of the literary *salons* destroyed by the Revolution, and his genius was more personal, more subjective, and therefore more lyrical. Mme de Staël was not influenced by love of religion and love of nature, but she was, like Chateaubriand, intensely personal and subjective, although more generous, and was cosmopolitan in her ideas. A great historical force acted on her, the despotism of the Emperor, which exiled her from France and made her travel all over Europe or compelled her to reside at Coppet, surrounded by a cosmopolitan crowd of admirers. Like the other exiles of that time she had to study foreign languages, and she was deeply impressed by the masterpieces of the German and Italian literatures. It was then that she wrote *De l'Allemagne*, in which we see her definition of the word *romantisme*, as meaning modern ideas in opposition to the spirit of antiquity of the classical school.

Chateaubriand and Mme de Staël interpreted admirably the historical and social forces of their time, and their works had a powerful influence on the development of the Romantic school, of which the principal causes were love of nature, the christian spirit, the study of foreign languages and literatures, and the lyric spirit or the study of the *moi*.

The four great poets of the 19th century are Lamartine, Hugo, Vigny, and Musset. They are all lyric, but Lamartine is the most lyric and subjective of the four, and there is little change caused in his verses by the change in his political opinions. His *Histoire des Girondins*, however, is the direct result of historical forces. In Hugo we see at first the Catholic and the royalist, then the passionate admirer of the Napoleonic epic, then the adherent to constitutional monarchy, and later the ardent republican. The changes in his ideas may be traced in a number of his works, until he became, as was said: "the voice of the people," and the interpreter, as he thought, of the feelings of his age. Alfred de Vigny and Musset express the disappointment and sadness of the men of their generation, who were born too late for the great deeds of the Empire. Vigny is sad and pessimistic, but does not despair, whilst Musset often abandons himself to his grief like a child, and gives vent to his feelings, sometimes in cynical words, and sometimes in passionate sobs.

The romantic and lyric school has been succeeded by the realistic, which makes society and the human heart its study. The great apostles of that school were Balzac and Flaubert, but let us mention specially the naturalist Zola, who dissects the body, and the psychologist Bourget, who analyzes the soul. I shall go no further in the study of contemporary French literature and wish only to express my regret that it is too often pessimistic. If French society be taken as a whole we find a happy and prosperous people, and no cause for pessimism in literature, inasmuch as discontent does not exist among the people. The great historical and social force in France, for the last twenty-eight years, has been the establishment of the Republic as a permanent government. The trials incident to the transformation from a monarchy to a parliamentary democracy may be the cause of the present pessimism in literature. The parliamentary system is the real cause of pessimism, says Mr. Bodley, in his recent work on France. This assertion is interesting but very paradoxical. Let us hope, at all events, that pessimism is about to disappear, and that M. Rostand's grotesque but noble *Cyrano* has brought back absolute faith in pure love and in the chivalric sentiments of Corneille's *Rodrigue* and Hugo's *Hernani*.

After this address the regular reading of papers was begun, with President Fortier in the chair.

1. "Are French poets poetical?" By Dr. P. B. Marcou, of Harvard University. [Printed in *Publications*, xiv, 257 f.]

Discussion by Professor T. Atkinson Jenkins.

To really answer the question put by this paper is, as all will admit, a task of extreme delicacy, needing first of all a clear definition of terms. Which French poets are meant? What is meant by "poetical?" While